

FACT SHEET: YOUTH POPULATION

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HIGHLIGHTS

- *In 2002, the total population of Jamaica was approximately 2.625 million people.³*
- *The population is evenly split between females and males, representing 50.7% and 49.3% of the population, respectively.³*
- *Increased life expectancy at birth has contributed to a gradual aging of the population. However, children and youth (0-24 years old) remain the largest age groups, accounting for 49.8% of the population.³*
- *An estimated two-thirds (66%) of women of reproductive age use contraception⁸, resulting in significant declines in the total fertility rate over the past three decades. The TFR in 1997 was 2.8 children per woman.³*
- *Young women (15-24), and women in rural areas, are less likely to use contraceptives than their older and urban counterparts, and have the highest birth rates nationwide.⁸*
- *More than half (52%) of the country's population now resides in urban areas.³*
- *The size of the average household declined from 4 persons in 1992 to 3.4 persons in 2002.⁹*
- *Emigration has contributed significantly to the decline in the population growth rate, to 0.5% per year.³*

Background

As the motto "Out of Many, One People" suggests, Jamaica is a nation of diversity, comprised of persons of African, European, South Asian, and East Asian ancestry, and is home to varied and dynamic cultural traditions. It is the third largest island in the English-speaking Caribbean, with mountainous terrain comprising approximately 80% of its surface area.¹ Much of the population resides on the plains and in coastal areas.¹ At 216 persons per square kilometre,² Jamaica is one of the most densely populated countries in the region. Approximately 52% of the population resides in urban areas³, with an estimated 43% of the total population living in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA)⁴, defined as

Since 1998, the annual rate of growth of the population has fallen below the target of 0.8% set by the National Population Policy,^{2,5} to stand at 0.5% per year in 2002.³ This decline is due, primarily, to a decline in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) coupled with the high rate of overseas migration. While the drop in fertility and the increased longevity of the population has led to an aging population³ Jamaica remains a nation of young persons. In 2002, children and youth, aged 0-24, accounted for nearly half (49.8%) of the total population.³

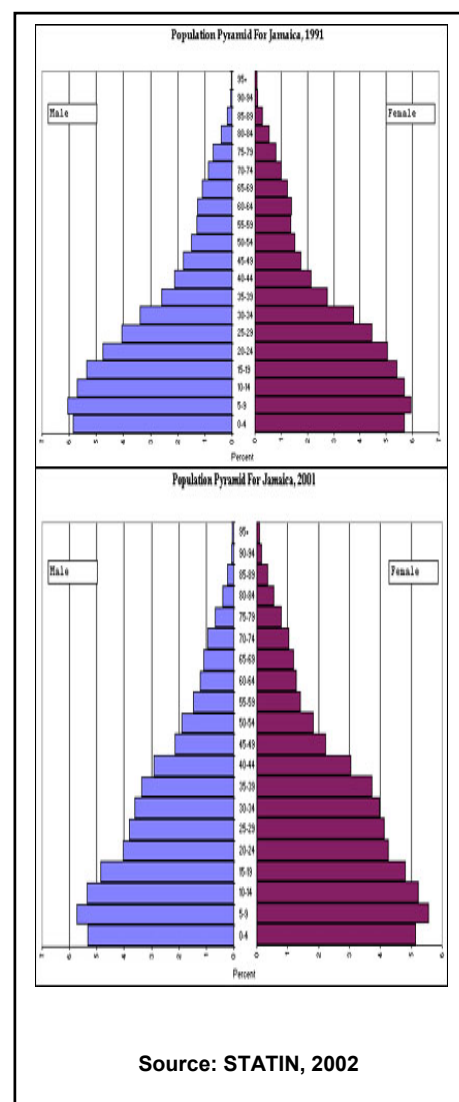
Age and Gender Distribution

The population is virtually evenly split between males (49.3%) and females (50.7%).³ Young persons (0-24) represent the largest demographic group, with children (0-18 years of age) currently accounting for 39.5% of the total population³ and youth (15-24 years of age), an estimated 18%.⁴

Over the past few decades, the country has witnessed the beginning of a demographic shift from a population comprised, overwhelmingly, of children and youth, to an increasingly middle-aged and elderly population.³ Life expectancy at birth currently stands at 70 years for males and 73 for females. Elderly persons (aged 60 and older) represent the fastest growing segment of the population, with an annual growth rate of 1.5%. An estimated one-tenth of the total population is over 60 years of age³ - an increase from 9.4% in 1991.⁷

Fertility

Due to the increased acceptance and use of contraception, improved health services for pregnant women and children, and the increased desire of many individuals and couples to limit family size, there has been a marked decline in the TFR over the last few decades. TFR declined from 4.5 children per woman in 1975 to an estimated 2.8 children per woman in 1997.⁶



According to the 1997 Reproductive Health Survey, close to 66% of women, aged 15-49, in union, use contraception. This rate is up from 62% in 1993 and 51% in 1983.⁸

Rates of contraceptive use vary with age and area of residence. Younger women and those living in rural areas are less likely to use contraceptives. In 1997, young women, aged 15-24, exhibited the highest birth rates across all age groups, at 112 births per 1000 women among 15-19 year olds, and 163 births per 1000 women among 20-24 year olds.⁸ Approximately 58.7% of young women, aged 15-19, and 67% of those aged 20-24 were using contraception, compared to 67.8% of women 25-29 and 68.8% of those aged 30-34.⁸

By location, women in rural areas exhibit the highest rates of fertility nationwide, with a TFR of 3.3 children per woman in 1997, compared with rates of 2.2 children per woman in the KMA, and 2.6 children per woman in other urban areas.⁸ In 1997, approximately 65.3% of rural women in unions were using contraception, compared to 66% in the KMA and 67.4% in other urban areas.⁸

Rural/Urban Distribution

The rate of urbanization has steadily increased over the last decade, changing from almost 50% in 1991⁷ to 52% in 2002.³ The KMA remains the most populous area, accounting for an estimated 43% of the total population.⁴ The parish of St. Catherine is next with approximately 18.5%.³ In addition, St. Catherine had the highest rate of population growth between the 1991 and 2001 censuses, with an increase in the 10 years of nearly 100,000 persons.³ This was due, primarily, to the growth of the Portmore community.

Hanover, with a population of 67,100 persons in 2001, accounted for the smallest share of the total population - 2.6%.³ This parish,

along with Trelawny and St. Elizabeth, had the lowest rate of urbanization, at under 20%.³

Household Size & Composition

According to the 2001 Survey of Living Conditions, the average household comprises 3.4 persons, down from 4 in 1992.⁹ Households exist in a variety of forms, ranging from married, or common law, couples living with their own children to "shifted" children residing with relatives or guardians. An estimated one-fifth of the nation's children live in households without either parent present. This is due largely to the high rate of overseas labour migration.⁶

According to the most recent Reproductive Health Survey (1997), visiting partner relationships were the most common form of union, with 28.5% of women, aged 15-49, involved in relationships in which the partner lived outside of the home. This was the case, particularly for young women, with 43.4% of those aged 20-24 involved in visiting partner relationships.⁸ Overall, only 16% of all women surveyed were legally married and 23.5% in common law unions.⁸ Among young women (15-24), rates of marriage ranged from 0.3% among 15-19 year olds to 3.9% among 20-24 year olds, and for common law union, from 6.6% among 15-19 year olds to 23.9% among 20-24 year olds.⁸

Nationwide, women head an estimated 44.7% of households.⁹ On average, these households include a greater proportion of children than male-headed households, at 87% and 70% respectively. Women headed households are less likely than households headed by men to include a partner, and are larger in size, at 3.6 persons, compared to 3.2 persons.⁹

International Migration

Since the 1960s, emigration has represented an important force in the nation's population dynamics.

Studies estimate that for over four decades emigration has reduced the population rate of natural increase by 45%.³ In 2002, a total of 23,200 persons migrated abroad in search of work and other opportunities. More than half (55%) of these were females. The United States is the main destination country, with more than 15,000 persons receiving visas for permanent residence in 2001.³

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Fact Sheet on Youth in Jamaica: Population



Jamaica Adolescent Reproductive Health Project
Ministry of Health, 2-4 King St.
Kingston, JAMAICA

Tel: (876) 948-2149 / 967-1100

Fax: (876) 948-2151

Email: youth.now@kasnet.com

Website: www.youthnowja.com